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## JOURNEY THROUGH PAIN

*Tracy Rathe, Nebraska Hospice and  
Palliative Care Partnership  
Kelli Funk, Nebraska Vocational Reha-  
bilitation*

Jennifer Schrodtt literally took a step that changed her life. While at work, she missed the bottom two steps of a staircase and received what is called a Lisfranc injury to her left foot. The fracture is rare and commonly misdiagnosed.

Living on a limited budget, Jennifer tried treating her injury on her own with ice and elevation. She maxed out the dosage charts for over-the-counter pain medications.

"In the morning, I would take something for the pain an hour and a half before I had to get out of bed because I knew I wouldn't be able to walk on my foot," said Jennifer.

Jennifer's demanding job as a hair styling instructor was becoming impossible; she could no longer stand on her foot. She loved the outdoors but couldn't even take her lunch-hour walks. She began to put on weight and ultimately the pain forced Jennifer from the 25-year career she loved.

Seven months after her injury, Jennifer visited a doctor, where she learned about



*Jennifer Schrodtt*

the Ticket to Work Palliative Care Demonstration Project that partners with Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation. This pilot program gives participants access to a team of professionals to help keep pain and symptoms from getting in the way of holding or keeping a job.

"I was struggling for months and months on my own. I couldn't keep wearing an air cast, a splint or a boot," said Jennifer. "I was physically in a great amount of pain."

After starting with the Palliative Care Pilot Project, Jennifer was then referred to Voc Rehab and started working with Employment Specialist Darla Atkinson in the Lincoln office.

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## PALLIATIVE CARE PROJECT

The Nebraska Ticket to Work Palliative Care activities developed by the Nebraska Hospice and Palliative Care Partnership are supported by a Medicaid Infrastructure Grant awarded to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. The program, serving the Lincoln and Omaha communities, began in 2006 and was designed to help meet the needs of people with disabilities who suffer from chronic pain by using palliative care methods. Not only does the program focus on managing pain and symptoms, but it also focuses on other aspects that surround living a productive life.

Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation saw a real need for this program with many of their clients. Assistant Director Margaret Hoffmann said, "We have a number of people who come in and they just can't continue pursuing a job or understanding how they are going to manage because of the pain issues they have."

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### *Journey Through Pain Continued...*

"She was a delight to work with because she was very focused," Darla said. "She was open to what needed to be done to get the job and she was open to learning how to get a job."

Darla worked with Jennifer on polishing her resume and cover letter for job interviews and they also practiced interview questions together.

"We helped her with her confidence. She had the drive," Darla said. "And, her preparation paid off so that she could go in and present herself in a professional manner."

In January of 2008, Jennifer landed a job assisting with the development of a new online education program with the University of Nebraska system statewide. Since beginning her new job, Jennifer has lost

25 pounds. She attributes that to a decrease in her stress level and the ability to take walks again. She now takes no medication.

Jennifer says she is willing to tell her story because, "What I went through, I know I am not alone. If this program can benefit just one person then it was worth my time. It worked, I believe in it. It just needs to be publicly known so it can benefit others."

Now, instead of focusing on her pain, Jennifer can focus on her new goals. She is working to obtain a master's degree and would like to advance at her new workplace.

"Voc Rehab was so beneficial and instrumental in my life that without them, I know that I probably wouldn't be sitting in this job today." added Jennifer. ➤

### *Palliative Care Continued...*

Many other agencies have joined VR in working with the Palliative Care Pilot Program. They include the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Workforce Development, Assistive Technology Partnership, Nebraska Advocacy Services and Easter Seals of Nebraska. "It really is using all the systems out there to bring services to an individual," said Hoffmann.

If you would like to know more about this pilot program, please contact Vocational Rehabilitation at (402) 471-3644 or visit the Nebraska Hospice and Palliative Care Partnership website at [www.nepalliativecare.org](http://www.nepalliativecare.org).

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